

## **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE – APPLICATION SCREENING**

Prepared by the Division of Human Resources in the Department of Personnel & Administration. Revised March 19, 2007.

### **GENERAL**

The purpose of application screening is to assure that applicants meet minimum job requirements before being allowed to proceed through an examination process. Generally, the goal is to include applicants rather than exclude. An applicant is responsible for providing enough information to allow a reviewer to make an “informed” decision about whether qualifications for the job are met. The same criteria and definitions must be applied to all applications during the screening process to assure consistency.

### **PREPARATION**

The announced job requirements are the standard against which applications are screened. It is a good practice to work with the appointing authority beforehand to establish the qualification standards that will be published in the announcement, for example, what is a related field of study in the minimum education requirements. Before beginning the screening process, assemble a list of the minimum requirements and substitutions criteria published in the job announcement.

The screening criteria include the following: Education, Experience and Other Requirements.

Education:	Fields of study. Related fields of study. Level of education. Appropriate substitution(s).
Experience:	Type of job duties, specific tasks or general occupation. Amount of time. Level or depth. Appropriate substitution(s).
Other Requirements:	Licenses, certificates, or registrations. Second language. Unique elements (i.e., proficiency in a skill such as Microsoft Access, etc.)

### **SCREENING**

To ensure consistency, a best practice is to review all applications at the same time.

Notes pertaining to the screening of an application can be made directly on the application or on a separate screening document or form. A sample screening form has been provided to assist reviewers in getting started (Attachment A). Creating a written record of the reviewers’ decisions related to each application enables information to be readily available if an applicant calls with questions. Keep the following questions in mind when reviewing applications:

- Am I consistently and objectively applying the screening criteria contained in the job announcement?
- Can I defend my decision based only on the written material submitted?
- Would another reasonable person make the same decision?

Date Received – A best practice is to date stamp all applications upon receipt. Prior to starting the application screening, decide how late applications will be handled and apply that standard consistently throughout the screening. When screening the application, check the date the application was received or, if allowed by the job announcement, the “postmarked by” date.

Colorado Mailing Address – All applicants must reside in Colorado unless the State Personnel Board has granted a residency waiver for the particular vacancy. Consequently, all applicants must present a Colorado mailing address. Applications from non-residents cannot be accepted.

## Education

Degree and Study Field – Screen for the appropriate level of degree (BA, MA, etc.), field of study, and acceptable substitutions. If a transcript was requested in the job announcement, verify that a copy was received including the information it contains. If requested, and no transcript is submitted, the application may be rejected or “conditionally accepted” in order to give the applicant additional time to submit such documentation. At some point in the exam process the degree will need to be verified following the process established by your department or institution.

Conditional Accept – If an applicant has not graduated but is currently enrolled and will complete the required degree within 90 days of the application deadline, the reviewer may “conditionally accept” the application. This allows the applicant to compete in the exam process but not be eligible for referral until proof of the degree is provided.

Partial Credit – Partial credit toward a degree requirement may be given for completed college coursework that did not result in a degree. Partial credit may also be given if the applicant has a degree in a study field other than the required or related study field.

An applicant with a degree in an unrelated field would generally receive no more than two years (60 hours) of credit for the “core” courses that they have completed for the degree. An applicant may also receive additional credit for college coursework in a field of study closely related to the required field of study.

When allowing partial credit for college coursework, transcripts must be reviewed to determine the exact amount of credit that the applicant should receive.

Use the following formulas to calculate the partial credit:

*# Hrs Completed / 30 semester hours = # of years credit toward Degree*

*Example: The applicant completed 40 semester credit hours toward a Bachelor's degree requirement. The applicant could receive up to 1-1/3 year of credit toward the required degree (40/30 = 1-1/3 year).*

Some colleges/universities report their earned course hours in quarter hours (QH) instead of semester hours (SH). Use the following formula to convert quarter hours to semester hours:

$$\text{Quarter Hours (QH)} \rightarrow \text{Semester Hours (SH)} \quad (QH \times 2/3 = SH.)$$

*Example: 45 Quarter Hours  $\times$  2/3 (.6667) = 30 Semester Hours*

If the applicant's hours are reported in contact or classroom hours, convert to semester hours using the formula:

$$\text{Contact Hours} / 16 = \text{Semester Hours}$$

*Example: 480 Contact Hours / 16 = 30 Semester Hours*

Experience – Past and current work experience, both paid and volunteer is acceptable for determining qualifications. The reviewer may need to ask for clarification in some areas (e.g. clarify the job duties and percent of time spent in each area to determine if the applicant meets the experience requirements).

Duties – Read duty statements carefully. Job title is not enough to indicate qualifying experience. Duties described by an applicant should be analyzed to determine the scope and depth of the work performed and how they relate to the minimum qualifications in the announcement.

Amount – Forty hours per week is considered full time. No additional credit is given toward the experience requirement for time worked over 40 hours per week.

Determine if experience is qualifying experience before making notation of amount of time in total years and/or months. If application information does not provide beginning and ending dates by month and year, the reviewer will follow the predetermined criteria for this situation (e.g., contact the applicant for clarification, not accept the experience, etc.). If only month and year are provided, count ending month but not beginning month (e.g., 6/05 to 9/05 would count as three months experience and 6/1/05 to 9/30/05 would count as four months experience).

Partial or Prorated – Anything less than 40 hours per week is considered part-time. Credit is given for part-time work but is calculated by prorating the qualifying experience using the following formula:

*(# months worked x hours per week worked) / 40 = months credit*

*Example: An applicant works 20 hours a week and has worked for 24 months.  
Applying the formula:  $(24 \times 20)/40 = 12$  months of qualifying work experience.*

Conditional Accept – The reviewer may “conditionally accept” an application if the individual is currently employed in qualifying experience and will meet the experience requirements within 90 days of the application deadline. This allows the applicant to continue in the exam process, but not be eligible for referral until proof of the experience requirements has been provided.

Experience in Association with a Degree – Work experience gained as part of a degree or certificate program is counted only once as either “education” or “experience,” but not both.

### Substitutions

Experience for Education – State statute and State Personnel Rules require that experience be substituted for any required education unless the education is required by law (i.e., a doctor must have a medical degree).

12 months of related experience is equivalent to 30 semester hours (one year) of education.

Refer to the definitions established in the job announcement substitutions for the required education when determining if the applicant’s experience is equivalent to the required education. When substituting experience for education, experience must be at an appropriate level that provided the same kind, amount, depth, and breadth of knowledge and competencies that would be acquired by obtaining the required level of education.

The experience equivalence that may be substituted for the required education is determined by applying the formula:

*Months of Qualified Experience x 2.5 = Semester Hours*

*Example: Four years (48 months) of experience is equivalent to a Bachelor’s degree (120 semester hours).*

If the job requires both experience and education, look for qualifying work experience equal to the combined total number of years of **both** experience and education listed in the job announcement. In general, if the minimum requirement is 3 years experience and a Bachelor’s degree, then the applicant must have at 7 years of work experience to qualify based on experience alone.

Education for Experience – College credit in excess of the minimum requirements may be used to satisfy a deficiency in qualifying work experience. When allowed, this must be stated on the job announcement. Education is considered in semester hours only.

To determine the amount of education to apply to the required experience, use the formula to convert semester hours to months of experience:

$$\text{Semester Hours} / 2.5 = \text{Months of Experience}$$

*Example: The minimum requirements are a Bachelor's degree and one year (12 months) of experience. The applicant has a Bachelor's degree, 15 additional semester hours of college credit, and six months of experience. The applicant could meet the minimum requirements by receiving 6 months of experience credit for the 15 additional semester hours ( $15 / 2.5 = 6$ ).*

Education may be used only once to meet the education requirement or as a substitution for the experience requirement, not both.

For education to be substituted for the required experience it must be in a study field directly related to the work assignment.

Education for Education – Advanced degrees may be used to substitute for any type of required lower level degree. The job announcement must clearly state when a higher-level degree will be substituted for another type of required degree. Example: “A Master's degree may be substituted for the required Bachelor's degree when the Master's degree is in a required field of study.”

Education for Education and Experience – At the discretion of the department or institution, advanced degrees may be used to substitute for any type of required lower level degree and a portion or all of the required experience. The job announcement must clearly state that a higher-level degree can substitute for education and experience. Example: “A Master's degree in one of the required study fields may be substituted for the Bachelor's degree and one year of the required experience.”

## **OUTCOME**

When the application screening is complete the reviewer should have a clear idea of which applications are “accepted” and “not accepted”. If the reviewer is not certain about some of the applications, a second review is necessary. The object of the second review is to obtain input from another person who understands the job requirements of the position. A second review may be completed by a Human Resource Specialist, a supervisor, a Subject Matter Expert (SME), or all three if necessary. However, the reviewer should make the final decision of accepting or rejecting these applications. It is a best practice to allow an applicant to continue in the process and allow the “test” to screen the individual out if the minimum requirements are marginally met.

## NOTIFICATION

State Personnel Rule 4-13 requires all applicants who apply for specifically announced positions to be notified whether they qualify.

Acceptance – Normally an applicant who meets the minimum requirements is not notified of this because test scheduling notices serve in place of a separate notice of acceptance. However, departments or institutions may choose to notify applicants who have been accepted, particularly if it will be several weeks before the testing process begins.

Not Accepted – Departments or institutions are highly encouraged to provide the notification of an application rejection in writing. This includes internal applicants. Notification letters must clearly state the reason(s) the individual's application was not accepted.

State Personnel Rule 8-102 provides applicants the right to request that the Personnel Director review any application rejected by a department or institution. The Rule also provides a 10-day timeframe following notice for the applicant to file such a request. Departments or institutions are required to provide applicants notice of this right and timeframe. Because the date the applicant received notice of an application rejection is used to determine if the request for Director's review is timely filed, it is strongly recommended that departments or institutions provide the notice of application rejection in writing in order to establish the timeline for an applicant's request for a Director's review. The Director will add up to three days mailing time to the date of the department's or institution's notice to determine timeliness of filing.

State Personnel Rule 8-101 allows applicants to attempt to informally resolve any disagreements pertaining to the rejection of an application with the department or institution within 5 days of notice of application rejection. Departments or institutions are encouraged to use the informal process to communicate with applicants to provide sufficient information so the reason(s) for the rejection of an application is fully understood.

A department's or institution's attempt to informally resolve a disagreement pertaining to an application rejection does not limit the applicant's right to request a Director's review. Additionally, any contact by the applicant or the department or institution in an attempt to achieve resolution of the application rejection does not extend the 10-day time limit for the applicant to file a written request for the Director to review the matter in accordance with State Personnel Rule 8-102.

Departments or institutions have two options for providing applicants information on the Director's application review process: (1) include the statement on the Job Announcement, or (2) include the statement on the notice of application rejection letter to the applicant. Choose one procedure to ensure consistency within the department or institution.

A department or institution may design its own application rejection notice. The following information is required: (See Attachment B for a sample application rejection notice.)

- The application has been received and reviewed against the announced minimum requirements for the position.
- The specific reason the application was rejected.
- The applicant has 5 days from the date of receipt of the notice letter to contact the department or institution to informally resolve any questions pertaining to the announced minimum requirements or the rejection of the application.
- The name of a department or institution contact for answers to questions.
- (If not included in the job announcement) Notice that the applicant has a right to request the Personnel Director's review of the application rejection; such request must be submitted on the standard Appeal/Dispute form found on the website at <http://www.colorado.gov/dpa/dhr/pubs/forms.htm>; and must be postmarked or received by the Director within 10 days from receipt of the notice of application rejection.
- The request for the Personnel Director's review must include the following:
  - Job title;
  - Department or institution involved;
  - Name of the department or institution representative with whom the applicant spoke during the informal resolution attempts;
  - The date of the conversation with the department or institution representative;
  - The specific issue to be reviewed; and
  - The reason it is believed the department's or institution's decision is arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to rule or law.

Director's Review Process – The purpose of the Director's review of an application rejection is to determine whether the department's or institution's decision was arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to rule or law. The Director must determine whether a reasonable person, fairly and honestly considering the same information available to the department or institution at the time of the decision, would be compelled to reach a different conclusion. To overturn an application rejection decision, the Director must find that there is no competent evidence in the record as a whole to support the department's or institution's decision.

Investigation – When an applicant requests that the Personnel Director review the rejection of an application, the Director will select an investigator from the Department of Personnel and Administration, Division of Human Resources staff to review the matter.

To complete the investigation, the investigator reviews all documents submitted by the applicant and department or institution pertaining to the application process in order to properly evaluate the applicant's complaint and to provide a recommendation to the Director. To assist in the evaluation of the applicant's complaint, the department or institution may be required to provide the following documents:

- A copy of all application documents submitted by the applicant prior to the department or institution decision;
- A copy of the department or institution job announcement for the position;
- A copy of the notification letter of application rejection to the applicant; and
- A department or institution statement explaining the reason for rejecting the application.

Director's Decision – The Director will decide whether the application rejection was arbitrary, capricious or contrary to rule or law. The Director's decision is issued within 90 days from the original filing of the request for a Director's Review. The Director's decision is final agency action under the Colorado Administrative Procedures Act and any further appeal goes to the Denver District Court. If a decision is not issued within the time period, the initial decision of the department or institution is upheld.

Both parties will be provided a copy of the Director's decision.

Request for Testing Accommodations – If an applicant has included a request for testing accommodations with the application form, the applicant must be contacted to discuss the request. For more information on testing accommodation, refer to *Technical Assistance - Test Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities* on the DHR website.

Every attempt is made to keep this information updated. For additional information, refer to the *State Personnel Board Rules and Director's Administrative Procedures* or contact your department human resources office. Subsequent revisions to rule or law could cause conflicts in this information. In such a situation, the law and rule are the official source upon which to base a ruling or interpretation. This document is a guide, not a contract or legal advice.



SCREENING SHEET (Sample)

Job Title: Administrative Assistant III

Position Number: XYZ-1234

Announcement Closing Date: XX/XX/2006

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Applicant ID #: \_\_\_\_\_

Minimum Qualifications: \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_ Three years of general clerical experience
- \_\_\_\_\_ Two years at the senior level
- \_\_\_\_\_ Education substitution
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other

## ATTACHMENT B

### Application Rejection Notice (Sample)

Date

Applicant's Name

Applicant's Address

City, State Zip

Registration Number:

Dear *Applicant*:

Thank you for your interest in employment with the State of Colorado. Your application for *(position title and department)* has been received and reviewed by a Human Resources Specialist against the minimum requirements listed in the job announcement. Regrettably, your application does not demonstrate that you meet the following requirement(s):

*(List the specific education or experience requirement(s) that is lacking.)*

If you have questions regarding the review of your application, please contact me by *(either a specific date or no later than a specific number of days following the receipt of this letter)*.

*(If you did not provide the due process notice for Director's Review on the Job Announcement, then the following information must be included in the application rejection letter.)*

*You may also file a request with the Personnel Director for review of this issue. A request for Director's review must be submitted on the standard Appeal/Dispute form found on the website at <http://www.colorado.gov/dpa/dhr/pubs/forms.htm>; must be postmarked or received by the Director within 10 days from receipt of this notice; and must include: (1) Job title; (2) Department or institution involved; (3) Name of the department or institution representative spoken to during informal resolution attempts; (4) Date(s) of the conversation; (5) Specific issue; and (6) Reason(s) you believe the decision is arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to rule or law. Direct your request to:*

*State Personnel Director  
1313 Sherman Street, Suite 122  
Denver, Colorado 80203*

*Signature)*

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE  
DHR APPROVAL FOR PUBLICATION

Technical Assistance Topic: Application Screening

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Section Manager: *Auréli Benalle* Date: 3/15/07

Division Director: *[Signature]* Date: 3/15/07